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# THE HINDU

## **Mobile Rythu Bazaars soon, says Minister**

Minister for Agriculture and Marketing Prathipati Pulla Rao on Wednesday assured introduction of mobile Rythu Bazaars very soon to ensure supply of vegetables to the people at their doorsteps. He inspected Srikakulam Rythu Bazaar along with Minister for Irrigation Devineni Umamaheswara Rao and Srikakulam MLA Gunda Lakshmi Devi.

Speaking to media on the occasion, he assured to construct storage facility with a capacity of 36 lakh metric tonnes. He has also promised to extend loans up to Rs.2 lakh for the farmers who kept their produce in the storage points. Mr. Pulla Rao felt that heat absorbing machines were need of the hour in Rythu Bazaars for the preservation of vegetables and other perishable items.

Ms. Lakshmi Devi urged him to modernise the existing Rythu Bazaar with Rs.9.5 lakh. The Minister directed the marketing officials to look into the proposal and take up the works immediately.

## **RBI extends, revalidates wheat cash credit limit**

The Reserve Bank of India on Wednesday revalidated and extended validity of authorisation of Rs 17,523 crore as cash credit limit (CCL) for wheat crop of the rabi 2016-17 season in Punjab till May 31.

Sharing details here, Food and Civil Supplies Minister Adaish Partap Singh Kairon said the move would pave the way for release of balance dues of farmers, arthiyas (commission agents) and other stakeholders.

It may be recalled that Rs 5,938 crore have already been released to farmers and arthiyas and the remaining are being despatched.

According to the Minister, state agencies, FCI and private traders have procured 108.29 lakh mt of wheat till date, of which 84.30 lakh mt has already been lifted.

As per the Punjab Agriculture Produce Markets Act, the whole procurement has to be lifted within 72 hours of procurement. - PTI

### **Centre buys 2,300 tonnes of onion to build buffer stock**

The Centre has procured 2,300 tonnes of onions directly from farmers this year so far to build buffer stock to be utilised for market intervention in the event of price rise during a lean season.

The buffer stock of onion is being created using the Rs 900-crore Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF). The objective of this fund is to control price volatility, thereby protecting interest of farmers and consumers.

### **Pulses and potato**

The fund is being used for creating buffer stock of pulses and potato also.

“We are aiming to buy 15,000 tonnes of onion this year. So far, nodal agencies Nafed and SFAC have procured 1,500 tonnes and 800 tonnes, respectively,” Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan told reporters.

The storage quality onion has been purchased directly from farmers in the price range of Rs 8.50-9 per kg. The stock would be kept at Lasalgoan, he said.

With onion prices ruling lower at Rs 2-3 per kg in Maharashtra, these two agencies are buying onion in the state to ensure support price to onion growers, he said adding that onion will also be procured from other growing states like Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

The arrival of rabi (winter) crop of onion has began and and cooperative firm NAFED will buy in total 10,000 tonnes, while the Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) will procure 5,000 tonnes.

### **Hiring of godowns**

On storage of onions, Mr Paswan said that onion procured from Maharashtra is being stored at Nasik and the nodal agencies have been asked to explore hiring of godowns in other States and even state governments have been told in this regard.

A team has been sent to Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh to explore godowns for storage of onions, he added.

Last year, the government procured 8,000 tonnes of onion but only after retail prices went through the roof.

### **Import plans**

This time, the Consumer Affairs Ministry has been asked to prepare timely import plans for pulses and onions. It has also been asked to intervene in the market on time so that consumers are not affected by price rise.

Onion production is estimated to be increase to 20.33 million tonnes in 2015-16 from 18.92 million tonnes in the previous year, as per the Agriculture Ministry data.

At present, retail price of onion is ruling at Rs 20 per kg in the national capital. Normally, prices flare up during August—September period.

- PTI

***The buffer stock of onion is being created using the Rs 900-crore Price Stabilisation Fund***

### **International recognition for Andhra agriculture project**

*The Centre for Development of Advanced Computing, Hyderabad developed the project, which is having a pilot run in Anantpur district*

An Andhra Pradesh project to collect very specific climate data from farms and give farmers personalised information through SMS has won the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) 2016 prize in the e-Agriculture category.

International Telecommunications Union (ITU) Secretary-General Houlin Zhao announced the prize Tuesday in Geneva. The Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (CDAC) in Hyderabad developed the project, which is having a pilot run in Anantpur district. WSIS said the organisation had an e-strategy for implementing it at the national level. “The WSIS Prizes

recognize all players in the effort to improve global connectivity, from governments and global ICT (information communication technology) companies to grassroots NGOs leading innovative ICT-oriented projects at the local level.” Zhao said.



Photo: Ch.Vijaya Bhaskar

A total of 18 prizes were awarded in categories ranging from international cooperation to information ethics. The prize in the e-Agriculture category was the only one won by an Indian organisation.

The project, Harmonized Information of Agriculture, Revenue and Irrigation for a Transformation Agenda - Precision Technology for Agriculture or HARITA-PRIYA, uses wireless sensor networks (WSN) to collect micro-climate information from farms, according to WSIS.

This data is used to create advisories and alerts on irrigation schedules and pests and plant disease. Based on them state officers send out personalised crop advisories in Telugu to farmers by SMS.IANS



## The season of scorching ironies



"...the total drought-affected population in the country is a staggering 54 crore, about two-fifth of the country."

*It is the Supreme Court and not Parliament that has found time to pay attention to serious issues of drought relief and mitigation for hundreds of millions of Indians*

Irony. This one word captures our response to the ongoing nationwide drought in more ways than one. We have woken up to the reality of drought a full six months after the end of monsoon. After waking up, we focus on the drinking water crisis in urban centres and not the multidimensional crisis of life and livelihood in rural hinterland.

A petition on a cricket tournament, rather than the plight of the people and its real culprits, has triggered media attention to the drought. Finally, it is the apex court of the country, and not its Parliament, that has found time to pay attention to serious issues of drought relief and mitigation.

On April 26, the Supreme Court concluded its hearing on a historic case. In an extraordinary gesture, the apex court of the land accorded highest priority to this case involving the plight of the last person affected by the second back-to-back drought in the country.

Swaraj Abhiyan had filed this petition in the middle of December last year, following the failure of monsoon and early reports of rural distress. Over the last four months, a two-judge bench of Justice Madan B. Lokur and Justice N.V. Ramana held 14 hearings, running into nearly 40 hours. That is much more than the total time devoted during this period to drought by the Parliament and all the State legislatures put together.

### **The colonial mindset persists**

What makes this case truly historic is not just the time and attention it received, but the range and nature of questions it involved. Starting as a petition for immediate drought relief, this case has grown into a judicial review of the state policy on rural distress and agrarian crisis.

This case could well mark a transition from the colonial framework to a constitutional framework of responding to a natural disaster like drought. During the British Raj, documents called Famine Codes laid down how the government was to act during famine-like conditions. The colonial approach was, naturally, minimalist and stingy. The idea was to spend as little money as possible while avoiding loss of lives.

This colonial mindset continued to inform the administrative approach to drought even after independence. Famine Codes continued in one form or another.

Democratically elected governments brought about some improvements like Maharashtra's Employment Guarantee Scheme (which inspired the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme or MGNREGS), Public Distribution System and Mid Day Meal scheme.

Technology for forecasting and tracking droughts has grown in leaps and bounds. Yet the governmental practices continued to be archaic and conservative. The patwari continues to be the eye of the government; 'annawari' or 'paisawari' is still the method to determine crop failure and the farmers continue to be paid ridiculously low amounts as crop-loss compensation, and that too after delays and bribes.

## **Need for a new framework**

Swaraj Abhiyan contended in the Supreme Court that it was time to shift to a new framework based on citizen entitlements, fuller responsibilities of the constitutional governments for drought relief, emphasis on drought mitigation and elimination of arbitrariness and political patronage from drought declaration and relief operations.

Lawyer Prashant Bhushan argued that many elements of this new framework were already in place.

The country has a Disaster Management Act of 2005 that gives special powers and responsibilities to the Central government. We now have a National Disaster Management Authority headed by the Prime Minister.

The Manual of Drought Management of 2009, a comprehensive document issued by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Union government, can replace the archaic Famine Codes.

Finally, all the weather station and remote sensing-sourced data has been brought together in the form of Agricultural Drought Assessment Report issued for major States every month by the Mahalanobis National Crop Forecast Centre. Someone needs to bring all this together and operationalise it.

This should normally be the responsibility of the executive. The Central government and the various State governments were expected to give life to this new framework.

However, this case brought out the sheer lack of political will on the part of democratically elected governments to extend elementary entitlements to their own citizens.

The Central and the 12 State governments, the respondents in this case, were repeatedly found unaware of their own regulations and unwilling to implement these.

The court witnessed games of procrastination and passing the buck, and was constrained to comment on this more than once.

Strangely, it was left to the petitioner to place on record all the key documents of the Government of India. In the course of the hearing, the Central government was forced to concede that it had not fulfilled many of its statutory obligations.

The National Disaster Policy required under the Disaster Management Act did not exist. The Disaster Mitigation Fund proposed under the same Act has not been created.

The National Disaster Response Force did not have any expertise to deal with the drought. It also admitted that the Centre had delayed releasing assistance to States under the National Disaster Response Fund.

The Government of India did not even have the correct count of the number of people affected by the drought.

The figure of 33.6 crore that it submitted to the court caused nationwide concern. In fact this was an under-estimate.

The correct count of the population in areas officially declared drought-affected so far is about 43 crore.

And if you take into account the districts that should have been notified but have not been so far, the total drought-affected population in the country is a staggering 54 crore, about two-fifth of the country.

### **Using the MGNREGS**

The most startling disclosures related to the MGNREGS. This scheme could have been one of the most efficient drought relief measures and should have been used generously during the last two years.

Instead, the government was not even paying for the work that had already been done. At the end of fiscal year 2015-16, the governments owed more than Rs.12,000 crore as “pending liabilities” which needed to be cleared before payments could be made in 2016-17.

It also turned out that the Central government was violating its own Master Circular in not releasing the full first tranche for MGNREGS amounting to over Rs.45,000 crore (while the much touted total budget for it is Rs.38,500

crore) that was due in the first week of April. Also, the government is paying lower than statutory minimal wages to MGNREGS workers.

The court proceedings bared the real intentions of the regime. Belying the Prime Minister's pro-farmer and pro-poor rhetoric in public, the Central government argued that it had done all it could for drought mitigation and more than beyond its means.

The government's counsel said that the state was not under any legal compulsion to offer additional dal (lentil) and edible oil in ration or milk or egg in the mid-day meal scheme as demanded by Swaraj Abhiyan.

The government claimed that there was enough fodder for cattle and that all necessary steps had been taken to resolve drinking water shortage. In any case, the Central government claimed that drought relief and mitigation was the responsibility of the State governments and that it respected the spirit of federalism.

This faith in federalism was touching, coming in the wake of developments in Arunachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

The various State governments either pretended that all was well or used resource crunch as alibi.

The cases of Gujarat, Haryana and Bihar came up for special scrutiny, as these States had not declared drought despite substantial rainfall shortage. Expectedly, the court was quite scathing in its remarks on these States.

### **Apex court to the rescue**

Given this lack of political will, Swaraj Abhiyan had to turn to the court for a paradigm shift in the way the state responds to drought. It requested the court for three kinds of reliefs.

First, Swaraj Abhiyan invoked Right to Life under Article 21 to claim some immediate drought relief measures for six months in the drought-affected areas:

universal access to food-grain quota, additional 2 kg of dal and one litre of edible oil for each household (following the Tamil Nadu model), one egg or

glass of milk everyday in the mid-day meal and extension of the scheme during summer vacations. It has also argued for implementation of the drought manual on drinking water and fodder, especially its recommendation of reservation for drinking water and setting up of cattle camps.

The second set of relief sought is medium to long term. This involves removing the informal cap on MGNREGS and ensuring adequate funds for employment generation, especially during the drought; restructuring of farm loans on the same lines as the famous restructuring of corporate loans; and raising crop-loss compensation to cover at least the cost of cultivation.

Finally, the petitioners have pleaded for a change in the archaic and arbitrary practices of declaration of drought and fixing the responsibilities of the Central and State governments in handling a disaster of this kind.

The Abhiyan has urged the court to appoint independent commissioners to monitor the implementation of court orders.

The judgment has been reserved by the Supreme Court and is expected any day. Judicial scrutiny so far has already forced various governments to move on drought relief.

The Central government has had to agree in the court to increase the first instalment of MGNREGS funds from Rs.7,000 crore to over Rs.19,000 crore and to clarify that there is no budget cap on the scheme.

It also agreed to revise the rates of crop-loss compensation and implement it in the coming financial year. After dragging their feet for over two years, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh governments were forced to implement the National Food Security Act.

It is only befitting in this season of ironies that the substance of this case has largely escaped national attention. On April 27, the Supreme Court was in the news concerning drought — but it pertained to the court confirming the High Court stay on IPL matches in Maharashtra!

*Yogendra Yadav is with Swaraj Abhiyan and is the National Convener of its Jai Kisan Andolan*



## **Online campaign to save trees**

Nearly 1,100 people signed an online petition in the last two days, appealing to Coimbatore District Collector to stop felling of trees that are on either side of the road in Pollachi.

A copy of the petition, which was shared on Facebook and will be live for about a month, was also submitted to the Collector on Wednesday by members of several non-Governmental organisations.

The State Highways Department (National Highways wing) is widening the road at Udumalpet, Pollachi, and Coimbatore.

An official of the department said that trees have been cut in Pollachi town and there are plans to bring down the trees between Eachanari and Sundarapuram in Coimbatore.

### **Decades-old trees**

The project does not involve land acquisition and trees have to be removed to widen the road. The department is also looking at alternatives so that the trees need not be cut.

Pravin Shanmughanandam, editor of *Pollachi Papyrus*, says the trees on Coimbatore-Pollachi road are several years old and Pollachi is known for its agricultural lands and greenery.

The support to the campaign in the last two days has shown how many people do not want the trees to be cut.

According to the online petition, it is said that nearly 1,700 trees on either side of the road on Coimbatore-Pollachi stretch are to be cut for the road widening project.

Huge, tall trees that are 60 years to 100 years old have been brought down in a few hours.

The project has been approved without considering the tremendous loss of the green corridor and the impact it will have on the environment.

Mr. Shanmughanandam said trees were brought down when the Mettupalayam road (Coimbatore to Narasimhanaikenpalayam) was widened and the stretch, which once had a green canopy, looks barren now.

“We did not want that to happen in Pollachi. While the road has to be widened, we should look at alternative solutions,” he said.

He said the District Collector asked the representatives to come up with viable solutions that will not hinder the road development work.

### **Website launched**

*Minister assures growers of subsidy on paddy seed*



Agriculture Minister Pocharam Srinivas Reddy on Wednesday assured subsidy on seed supplied to paddy seed growers in the backdrop of one-third subsidy on soyabean seed.

The assurance was given at a meeting here of seed growers on the occasion of the launch of website of seed certification agency, seed development corporation and oilseed farmers’ cooperative federation.

He responded to a request from a farmer from Miryalguda, Bixamaiah, when the rich benefit reaped by soyabean seed cultivators was being discussed.

## Variety of mangoes on sale at festival



**KING OF FRUITS:**A scene from the mango festival being held at the Gandhi Park in Kozhikode. —Photo: S. Ramesh Kuru

The mangoes from Muthalamada in Palakkad have been a major attraction of the Mango Festival organised by the Calicut Agri-horticultural society in Kozhikode for the last five years.

What makes the Muthalamada mangoes so popular is that they are naturally ripened at a time when chemically ripened mangoes throng the market.

But for the mango farmers of Muthalamada it has been a bad season with the climate not favouring them at every turn.

“The first batch of flowers was destroyed in the rain and wind in November. The second was full of male flowers and these mangoes have come out of the third batch,” said V.Radhakrishnan, a member of the Muthalamada Mango farmers association, who has accompanied the team that has come to Kozhikode for the week-long festival.

The crop being late cost the farmers too much as they could not send the usual package to Delhi in January. Moreover, the heat this summer has caused even the ripe mangoes to wrinkle and fall off the trees prematurely.

‘Chakkarakkutty’, the sweet little mangoes are one of the most sought after varieties at the festival and costs Rs.120 per kg.

“We can not sell them cheaper. There are only two or three trees that grow them and it costs around Rs.700 to pluck the ripe ones,” Mr.Radhakrishnan said, adding that the Agricultural Department of the State is yet to recognise mango cultivation as agriculture and hence did not provide any kind of support to the farmers, who have suffered 40 percent loss this season.

The festival that began at the Gandhi Park on Cherootty Road features noted varieties such as Alfonsa, Khudadath, Banganappalli, Malgoa, Priyor, Chandrakkaran, Jahangir, Himayudeen, Himapasanth and Banasheen.

An exhibition of around 50 varieties of mangoes produced at the District Agricultural Farm in Thaliparamba is part of the festival.

The festival concludes on May 10.

### **Heatwave: compensation for crop loss sought**

*Farmers have lost an estimated Rs. 10 crore in vegetable cultivation*



NO RESPITE:A farmer watering his crops at Kannadikkal in Kozhikode. —  
Photo: S. Ramesh Kurup

The District Agriculture Department has submitted an interim report to the District Collector seeking compensation for farmers who suffered crop loss in the searing summer heat wave.

The loss estimated so far is Rs.10 crore and the report will be forwarded for the consideration of the State government.

Agriculture Department officials say the assessment of loss is still going on in most of the the grama panchayats. The interim report says that it is the vegetable cultivators who suffered huge loss with the unfavourable weather change.

Both the small-scale and large-scale farmers, who ventured into vegetable cultivation after obtaining loans from various micro financing groups, are finding it hard to compensate the loss.

Ajitha Kumari, a Kudumbasree worker from Mavoor, said it was the unavailability of water for irrigation that affected her small farming venture. “Many farmers in our area are struggling to save the cultivation,” she added.

Referring to the interim report, a Deputy Director attached to the Agriculture Department said it was prepared in such a way so as to avail quick compensation for the farmers under the Disaster Assistance Programmes of the Union government.

“We will be submitting monthly reports to cover all farmers who suffered loss,” the officer said.

### **It's official: Locals will now map state's biodiversity**

*Implementing a key section of the Biological Diversity Act 2008, state govt orders all local bodies to form committees for biodiversity management*

Over seven years after the Biological Diversity Act 2008 espoused the formation of Biodiversity Management Committees (BMC), the state government has issued a Government Resolution directing all local bodies within the panchayat raj system to form them. This effectively means that Maharashtra's biodiversity will now be mapped by locals.

The GR issued on May 2 by the state Rural Development Department asks all Zilla Parishads (ZP), Panchayat Samitis (PS) and Grampanchayats (GP) to do the needful as mandated by the Act.



The committees at the ZP and PS levels will comprise seven members who will be experts in agriculture, forest products, fishery, animal husbandry and related fields.



A view of the Western Ghats—File Photo

At the GP level, the committee will be established as a Village Development Committee. All these committees can have government officers from different department as invitees and the tenure of the BMC will be same as that of elected civic bodies.

The BMC is tasked with maintaining a register of biodiversity in their area of influence.

The catalogue will also mention the use of natural resources, permissions for the same and monetary benefits. It will have the right to only remark or suggest in matters coming from the Maharashtra State Biodiversity Board or the national body over the use of natural resources or information related to it.

“It will surely give power to the people to decide on the use of their natural wealth, especially at a time when resources are under threat from various companies and even the government.



One must understand that this can be manipulated as well, so it is necessary to involve erudite members in these committees,” said Stalin D, Director-Projects with NGO Vanashakti.

Following the enactment of the biodiversity law, several committees were set up at various locations.

“This GR will make it mandatory for all local bodies in the panchayat raj system to have these BMCs. It will be a concentrated effort from all side now,” a senior official with the Rural Development Department said.

Several activists fighting polluting industries have welcomed the move. “This will be a good thing for the Konkan region. We need to go to people and run an awareness programme.

The more people involved, more the data. All Environment Impact Analysis (EIA) reports need to take inputs from these committees,” said Satyajit Chavan, who is spearheading the protest against polluting industries in Konkan area.

*It will give power to the people to decide on the use of their natural wealth*

*Stalin DNGO Vanashakti*

## **UAHS conference from today**

The University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences (UAHS), Shivamogga, is set to host a two-day conference from Thursday on postgraduate research in agricultural universities.

Vice-Chancellor C. Vasudevappa told reporters on Tuesday that more than 200 persons, including teachers and students from across the nation, will present their papers at the convention. G. Venkateshwarulu, Assistant Director General of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, will inaugurate the conference. The inaugural session will commence at 9.30 a.m. on Thursday.

Mr. Vasudevappa also said a tender has been floated for the fencing of the 800-acre land allotted to the university to set up its own campus in Iruvakki

village in Sagar taluk. He added that he expects the work to be completed and classes to begin soon.

### **Beaten by drought, farmers forced to sell their cattle**



Dry days: These days, the weekly cattle markets held in Arsikere taluk in Hassan are packed with desperate farmers looking to sell cattle they can no longer care for. According to some villagers, getting even two pots of water has become difficult.— photos: prakash Hassan

Many farmers in drought-hit parts of Arsikere are resorting to selling their cattle for paltry sums as it is increasingly becoming difficult to provide them fodder and water.

These days, the weekly cattle markets held in different places in the taluk are packed with such desperate farmers.

In the last few months, hundreds of farmers in Arsikere and Belur taluks have sold their cattle. Lokesh Siddaveerappa, a coconut grower of Arakere in Arsikere taluk, sold his four cows recently, thus ending his family's long history of cattle rearing.

His son Sharat Kumar (27) told *The Hindu*, "From the time of my grandfather, we had been rearing cattle. During our school days, there were about 40 head of cattle in our house. My father put an end to this recently and the cattle shed has been converted into a room to store coconuts."

Mr. Siddaveerappa said his hand was forced by the lack of water and fodder. “It has been a drought here for the past two to three years. The yield in coconut farms too has come down. Borewells and tanks have gone dry. From where should we get fodder and water?” he asked.

Hema, an agricultural labourer in the same village, said her family had sold three head of cattle. “Fetching two pots of drinking water has become difficult these days. When this is the condition, how can we take good care of the cattle?” she asked.

Paramesh of Mastihalli, near Banavara, said, “An HF (Holstein Friesian) cow requires at least four to five pots of water a day. You won’t believe it, but some days we don’t get even two pots. Many farmers have come to a conclusion that it is easy to sell them, instead of watching them die every day.”

When this reporter visited the weekly cattle market at Arsikere on Wednesday, hundreds of farmers had arrived with their cattle. Some of the buyers were farmers, but most were purchasing cattle for meat purposes.

Among those present was Ramesh of Gandasi, a trader who purchases cattle from villagers and sells them in the market at a higher price. He said, “Many farmers have already sold their cattle. They can’t keep them long in a situation of drought.”

### **Farmers wait for skies to open up**

Farmers in the Mysuru are desperately waiting for rain, so that they can start sowing.

There was no rain though in many parts of the district it was overcast, particularly during the evenings. Farmers of Mysuru, Chamarajanagar and surrounding places normally experience pre-monsoon showers from the second week of April to the second week of May.

But this year, the rain failed and the hopes of farmers to grow jowar, maize, sunflower, green gram, cowpea have been dashed.

Normal rain during April in Mysuru is 61.9 mm while this year it was just 15 mm. Last year, the district had received 81.4 mm rainfall, around this time.



Farmers have not been able to take up sowing owing to failure of pre-monsoon showers in Mysuru.— PHOTO: M.A. SRIRAM

Similarly, the normal rain from May 1 to 4 is 15.2 mm but this year it is just 7.4 mm. Last year, over 17.2 mm of rain occurred for four days in May.

M. Mahanteshappa, Joint Director of Agriculture, told *The Hindu* here on Wednesday that cumulative rainfall in Mysuru this year till May 4 was 33.1 mm, while the normal is 96.6 mm. Last year, for the same period Mysuru received 128.3 mm of rain.

Mr. Mahanteshappa said that K.R. Nagar and Hunsur taluks received 10.9 mm and 13.8 mm of rain respectively during the first four days of May. Hence, farmers in these two taluks have reportedly started sowing seeds in over 175 hectares.

Mr. Mahanteshappa said that the department would instruct farmers to go in for alternative crops, like pulses or cotton, if there is no rain in another three to four days.

Meanwhile, the Agriculture Department has stored seeds of jowar, maize, sunflower, green gram and cowpea, to be distributed to farmers in the event of rain in the next few days.

### **Crosswinds in a cashew orchard**



**WILTING Hopes:**Elderly women in Panruti say the only vocation they know is cracking cashew kernels.— Photo: T. Singaravelou

This is peak cashew season but most farmers in Panruti, Tamil Nadu's cashew belt, have harvested less than a third of their usual volume.

Recent heavy rain, and Cyclone Thane before that, uprooted or washed away several trees, and this time, most cashew flowers have simply dried up.

In this election season, the farmers are also livid that they have not received any compensation for the damage caused by floods.

“The Horticulture Department had promised us hybrid saplings, but nothing has come our way.

I have only a few cashew trees left in my field. As regards floods, not even the Rs. 5,000 that was promised has arrived.

Nothing specific for cashew crops was announced,” said Nagarajan, who runs a packing unit.



He says he sells tender coconuts to make up for the loss in income.

“This time, people do not want to vote for the ruling party [the AIADMK]. They are upset that the government has not done anything for the cashew industry, which forms a large voter base in this area,” says S. Jesudas, a farmer from Santhipattu.

### **Low yield**

From the 110 acres of land that usually yields about 500 bags of cashews a day, this time farmers in Panikkankuppam says they could manage just 15 bags of 80 kg each.

“Usually, we get about 500 bags from a piece of land that belongs to a temple and all of us take it on lease,” said A. Raj, a farmer, who has refused to sell his cashew harvest now as he prefers to peddle it in June when he has to pay for his children’s school fees.

### **Rain blamed**

Farmers blame the heavy rain for the predicament. “Since supply is low, prices are volatile and big companies that export nuts want to buy up everything available.

They have been announcing through loudspeakers that they will pay higher rates for unprocessed nuts. This means small units would not receive the raw material,” said R. Elango, who runs a small-scale unit for packing nuts.

Families in at least 15 villages, including Malayampattu, Andikuppam, and Mutharasapatti, are involved in cashew cultivation and processing.

They have been calling for the withdrawal of a 9.36 per cent duty imposed by the Union government on import of raw cashew nuts.

“Only big companies will benefit from this. Since the crop failed this year, we won’t be able to provide year-round employment to people. Imported nuts from Africa and other places are brought in for processing,” Mr. Elango said.



## **Hard work**

In an otherwise quiet neighbourhood in the region, the constant din of large pebbles knocking on the cement floor is the only noise.

Seated on the ground, a group of senior citizens seems to be working faster than they appear to be able to.

With a few taps of the stones, they break open cashew kernels covered in ash and throw the nuts into a container within seconds.

“Our hands, fingers and arms ache after the day-long work. But we cannot sit at home. We need to take care of our children, and in some cases, our sons demand money, many of them are alcoholics,” says Sakunthala, who seems adept at her work.

Ask them who they plan to vote for and the reply is “why bother about it now.” Seceeli Chinnapparaj, who employs the women, says thanks to an NGO, they were able to arrange for a loan.

***Panruti is livid that farmers have received no compensation for flood damage***

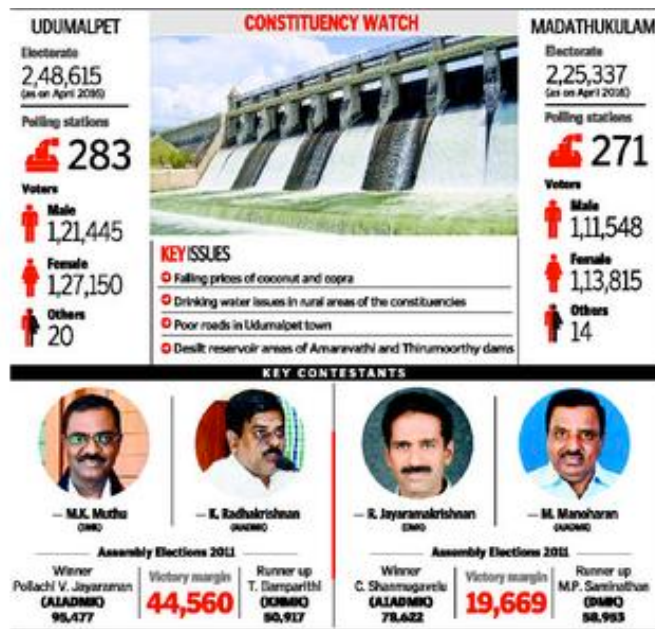
## **Grievances of farmers have so far gone unheard**

Almost 60 per cent of the acreage under coconut in Tirupur district comes under Udumalpet and Madathukulam Assembly constituencies and hence, one of the challenges for the candidates will be to answer a series of queries lined up for them from the farmers.

Farmers’ community are of the view that elected representatives did very little to hear the grievances once the elections were over and there were not much constructive suggestions/action plans seen in the manifestos to support the interest of coconut farmers.

According to official statistics, around 32,000 ha of coconut are raised in Udumalpet and Madathukulam constituencies. “We have been asking for permission to tap neera and there should be more government support to protect the prices of coconut and copra,” pointed out S. Selvaraj, a

prominent coconut farmer who recently launched a coconut growers' company at Udumalpet.



Farmers in general are also disappointed that de-silting of Amaravathi Dam and Thirumoorthy Dam has not been taken up to improve the water holding capacity. More water will help improve the wetting cycles along PAP canal, the farmers opined.

Other demands of people include improvement of roads in Udumalpet town, increasing the frequency of drinking water supplies in rural areas of both the constituencies.

Even though there are many political parties in the fray, with each of them fancying their chances of victories, it looks that the main contest would be between the AIADMK and DMK candidates as was the case since 1989.

### Poll history

A glance through electoral history of Udumalpet indicate that AIADMK candidates had won on six occasions out of the 14 elections held and DMK men won on four times.

Congress won thrice and an Independent was triumphant once.

In the only election held last time at Mdathukulam, the AIADMK candidate won.

### **Release water to save crop: Krishnasamy**

The livelihood of farmers of over 20 villages had been affected as water had not been discharged to save standing paddy, banana and other crops, K. Krishnasamy, president, Puthiya Tamilagam and Ottapidaram MLA.

Addressing media persons here on Wednesday, he said farmers from Athimarapatti, Kulayankarisal and other villages had been demanding release of water through North Main Channel from Papanasam dam in vain.

These farmers were also affected by the floods in November last year.

After losing several acres of farm lands to flood, they were facing a drought-like situation now. Even when there was a good storage of water in the dam, the Public Works Department authorities were reluctant to discharge the required amount of water.

Moreover, several villages were reeling under drinking water scarcity for the past four months. Though there was good rainfall during last monsoon, water from Tamirabharani was not utilised properly.

Dr. Krishnasamy accused the Thoothukudi Collector of favouring the ruling All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam.

It was a challenging task for the Election Commission to prevent distribution of cash or freebies to voters. AIADMK cadres had been attempting to bribe voters and at any cost it should be prevented since 'money' was the only weapon the AIADMK was relying on now, he said.

### **Training programme on irrigation methods**

A free one-day training programme on 'Installation and management of drip and sprinkler irrigation methods' will be held at the Krishi Vigyan Kendra on the Veterinary College and Research Institute premises on May 12.

## Topics

A release from N. Akila, Senior Scientist and Head, said that the importance of drip irrigation, selection of irrigation methods to benefit crops, installing the system, fertilizer management and maintaining the drip irrigation system would be dealt during the training.

Farmers, members of self-help groups, youth and interested persons can participate in the training programme.

## Registration

Interested should register themselves for participating in the training. For registration, visit the KVK in person or register through phone: 04286-266345 and 266650 by May 11, the release added.

## Fishermen too hit by drought



The depletion of the Almatti backwaters has severely affected fishermen.—  
PHOTO: RAJENDRA SINGH HAJERI

The prevailing drought has not only caused worry for farmers and cattle owners but also fishermen have not been spared by nature's vagaries in Vijayapura district.

For decades, the Almatti dam backwaters have been a major source for fishermen to make a living. However, it is now running dry, severely affecting marine life and the fishermen dependent on it.

“Generally, people do not prefer to eat fish during summer, thus the cost of it declines; but this time, the cost has spun around owing to dearth of fish due to sharp depletion of water-level,” said Keshav Uppaladinni, a fisherman.

He said that the fishermen use around a 30-km radius of the backwaters in about six villages to catch fish using over a thousand coracles. The fishermen normally catch Katla, Kipli, Muchali, Bali, Ruhu and Gungri.

“During the season, we catch around 10 quintals of fish and transport it to Solapur, Hyderabad and also sell it in the local market.

But following the drought, we have been catching hardly a quintal of fish everyday for the last about two months. Due to dearth of fish, the cost has increased this year,” another fisherman Siddalinga Adavi said.

The fishermen alleged that the Department of Fisheries too has not been releasing adequate seedlings into the backwaters due to which production has been adversely affected.

The impact of drought could be easily gauged at the fish market near Almatti dam where most of the fish sold are caught in ponds and not the river.

The vendors said that as fish from the river has become scarce, fishermen are bringing fish from ponds and small lakes to sell here.

### **Farmers to get help from Tiruchi scientists in growing banana**

*Team from National Research Centre for Banana visits College of Horticulture*

Scientists from the National Research Centre for Banana in Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu, will help farmers in Bidar and Kalaburagi in cultivating banana. They will work through the Bidar-based College of Horticulture.

Resource persons will train farmers in cultivation methods, protection of crops from pests and insects, post-harvest technologies and provide

seedlings and other inputs. The farmers will also be exposed to the market for fresh fruits and fruit-based products.

The National Research Centre for Banana will organise demonstrations in the fields of progressive farmers and organise lectures on the College of Horticulture premises here.

As a first step towards this long-time association, a team, led by the centre director B. Padmanabhan, visited the College of Horticulture recently.

They interacted with farmers, teachers and students in the college. They inspected facilities such as the post-harvest laboratory, the library, and the farms and green houses on the college premises.

V. Kumar, a scientist, said that Bidar's climate was apt for horticulture crops and encouraged farmers to try various types of bananas.

It is best to start cultivation in a small area and increase it gradually, he said. He asked farmers to study the market and consult experts before taking up any new crop.

R. Thangavelum, another scientist, said that the market for the Kamalapur red banana would grow further as consumers were slowly realising its health benefits.

Dr. Padmanabhan pointed out that one of the mandates of the centre was to train farmers in advanced farming methods and to introduce the crop to non-traditional areas.

He said that the geology and climate of Bidar and Kalaburagi were well suited for the crop.

Temperatures ranging from 25-35 degrees Celsius are optimal for banana. Wind speeds below 40 kmph will protect the crops from falling, he said.

“This is just the beginning, we will keep coming,” he said.

Dr. Padmanabhan said that Bhagwant Khuba, MP, initiated this process by writing to the ICAR and the banana research institute. “The MP wanted us to inspect the area to see if banana could be grown here and to train farmers, if possible,” he said.



V. Kumar and K.J. Jayabhaskaran were the other members of the team.

Suraj Patil, a farmer from Kamalapur, asked farmers to pick banana over sugarcane. “This has a ready-made market, has assured yields and frees you from the clutches of the sugar factories,” he said.

S.S. Baragimath, Deputy Director of Horticulture Department, said that banana farms added up to 2,000 hectares in Bidar district.

This can be increased gradually once farmers realise the benefits, he said. He pointed out that farmers could double their cultivable area by opting for drip irrigation, and increase productivity by 20-30 per cent.

He said that banana needed 15-20 litres of water per day per plant that was slightly higher than sugarcane. He said that bananas had a large market potential as they could be sold anywhere.

College of Horticulture scientists N. Srinivas and Vijayalakshmi P. were present.

### **Concern at slump in rubber production**

*Demand pegged at 9.6 lakh tonnes this fiscal; concern among consuming industry*

The Rubber Board estimates that natural rubber production in the country during the current financial year would be in the vicinity of 5.6 lakh tonnes against a projected demand for 9.6 lakh tonnes.

The rubber production figures, which came up at an official meeting of the board at the end of April, have triggered some concern among the consuming industry about the availability as well as the reliability of the figures, considering the present adverse weather conditions that prevent any tapping.

Rajiv Budhreja, director general, the Automotive Tyre Manufacturers’ Association (ATMA), said the Rubber Board projection for 2015-16 proved to be around 25 per cent less than the actual production.

There was a shortage of 1.87 lakh tonnes between the figures of estimated production and actual production, he said.

## **Poor price levels**

The tyre-makers conceded that actual production during the last financial year was affected by poor price levels. However, ATMA alleged that the board usually started the year with projections of high production and tapered the estimates as the year progressed.

Speaking for the farmers, Siby Moniappally, a former member of the board, said that India should be able to produce its requirement of natural rubber even under the trying circumstances.

However, he reiterated an earlier demand that the board should estimate actual production capability so that import could be reduced to the minimum to sustain natural rubber cultivation in the country.

He said the price of rubber, despite rising about 40 per cent over last year's levels, was not remunerative for the farmers. If the price was held over Rs.150 a kg (RSS-4), farmers would be encouraged to venture into tapping, he added.

According to provisional figures released by the board, India produced 5.63 lakh tonnes of rubber during last year against the previous year's level of 6.45 lakh tonnes. Consumption during 2015-16 stood at 9.87 lakh tonnes.

The consuming industry imported 4.54 lakh tonnes during last year. While there was a shortage of nearly 13 per cent in production during 2015-16 compared to the previous year, consumption fell 3.3 per cent during the period.

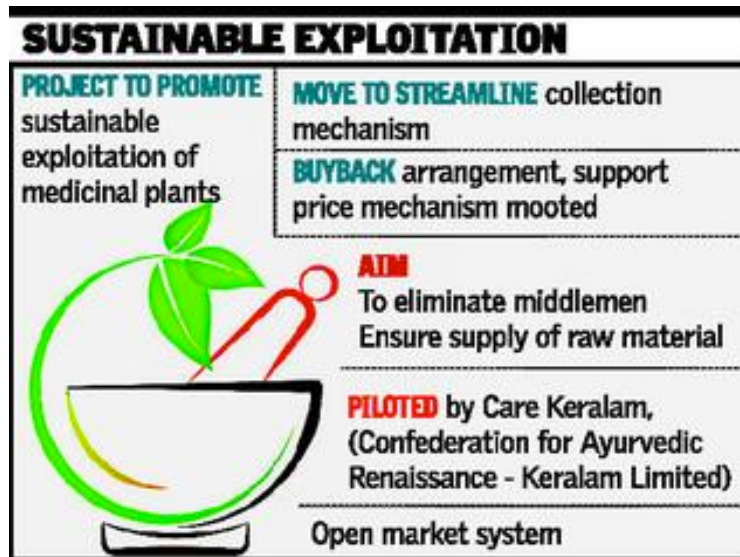
## ***Flagging concerns***

***Rubber Board estimates production at 5.6 lakh tonnes***

***Demand pegged at 9.6 lakh tonnes this fiscal***

## Ayurveda industry to tie up with farmers

*Farmers, tribes will sell raw material to the industry in an open market, avoiding middlemen*



The Ayurveda industry is embarking on an initiative to link herbal drug manufacturing units with tribal councils and farmers, to eliminate middlemen and ensure the supply of raw material through sustainable exploitation of medicinal plant resources.

Piloted by Care Keralam, (Confederation for Ayurvedic Renaissance-Keralam Limited), the industry body of herbal product manufacturers in the State, the project involves a mandi (open market) system where farmers and tribes can sell their produce directly to the industry. It also proposes a buyback agreement between the farmers and the industry.

### Support mechanism

“The mechanism will help avoid fleecing by middlemen and the cultivators will be assured of fair price, prompt payment and marketing support,” says Tito Thomas, Senior Manager, Medicinal Plants Promotion Centre, Care Keralam.

“Integrating the cultivation, procurement and distribution systems is key to the success of the scheme.”

## **Planning committee**

A planning committee comprising representatives of the industry, farmers and experts has been proposed to ensure a support price mechanism and a sustainable distribution network.

Pointing out that unsustainable exploitation had led to the disappearance of many medicinal plant species from the areas bordering forests, Mr. Thomas said a distributed system of procurement would ensure availability and prevent price fluctuations.

The concept note adds that collection of herbs from forest areas would also help avoid quality issues caused by pesticide and mercury contamination in farmed herbs.

In a communication to member units, Care Keralam has outlined steps to attract tribal councils and farmers to the initiative by supporting welfare programmes.



## **Soaring sugar prices no sweet deal for cane farmers in Uttar Pradesh**

During the current sugar season (October-September), UP mills, as on May 2, had bought cane worth Rs 17,972.23 crore at the state advised price (SAP) of Rs 280 per quintal.

In Uttar Pradesh only the mills are reaping the gains from higher prices and production not taking a hit.

In the last six months, retail prices of sugar have soared from Rs 30 to over Rs 40 a kg because of drought in Maharashtra and Karnataka.

But this has failed to benefit farmers, including in Uttar Pradesh where only the mills are reaping the gains from higher prices and production not taking a hit.

During the current sugar season (October-September), UP mills, as on May 2, had bought cane worth Rs 17,972.23 crore at the state advised price (SAP) of Rs 280 per quintal.



Given depressed sugar prices at the start of the season, the Samajwadi Party government had allowed factories to pay the SAP in two instalments.

The first Rs 230/quintal instalment was to be paid within 14 days of cane delivery, with the remaining Rs 50 payable within three months after completion of crushing operations.

But mills have so far paid just Rs 11,268.10 crore, which is below even the Rs 14,754.35 crore that farmers should have got at the Rs 230/quintal rate within 14 days of supply.

The big defaulters — accounting for the bulk of the Rs 3,486.25 crore first instalment arrears — include Bajaj Hindusthan (Rs 1,254.36 crore), Mawana Sugars (Rs 443.14 crore), U K Modi Group (Rs 335.19 crore), Simbhaoli Sugars (Rs 311.66 crore), Rana Group (Rs 222.97 crore), Sir Shadi Lal Enterprises (Rs 138.43 crore), Uttam Sugar (Rs 115.49 crore) and K.K. Birla Group (Rs 89.84 crore).

“At current average ex-factory sugar realisations of Rs 3,400 per quintal (as against a low of Rs 2,250 last July), farmers should have received at least the first instalment.

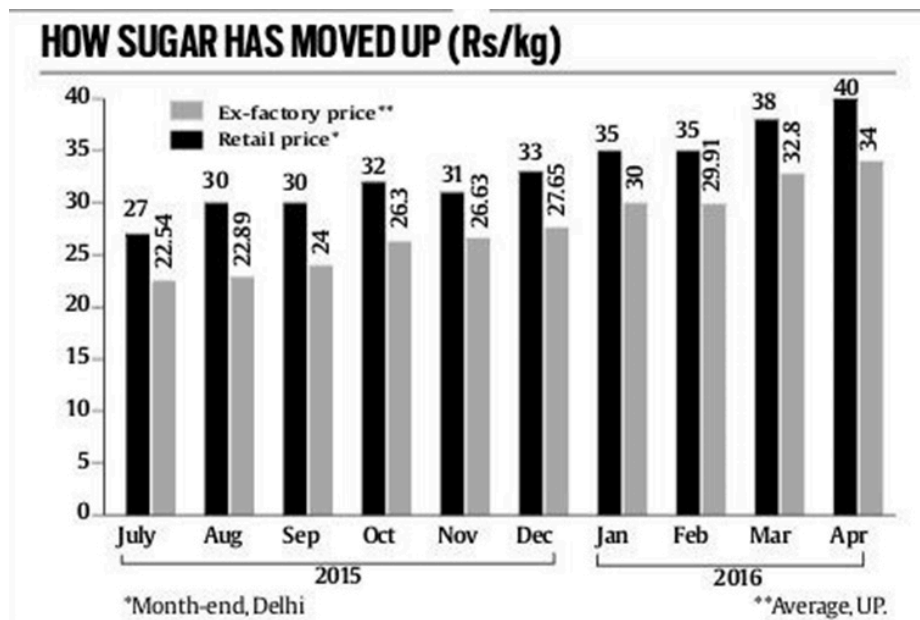
Moreover, the average sugar recovery from cane this season has been 10.6 per cent, compared to 9.54 per cent for 2014-15.

When the same quantity of cane is giving you more sugar, which is also selling at a higher price, there's really no excuse for not paying farmers," an industry source said.

Quite a few companies have made the Rs 230/quintal first-instalment cane payments. These include Balrampur Chini, Dhampur Sugar, DCM Shriram, Dwarikesh Sugar Industries, Dalmia Bharat Sugar and Triveni Engineering.

"The ones not making real effort to clear cane arrears aren't the best advertisement for the industry, especially when assembly elections in UP are due in less than a year.

Also, it would become politically more difficult to counter allegations of mills profiteering at the expense of both consumers and farmers," the source said.



Sugar is now retailing in Delhi at Rs 41 a kg, having risen from a low of Rs 27 towards July-end.

The price surge, mainly prompted by reduced cane availability from Maharashtra and Karnataka for the coming 2016-17 season, has already set off alarm bells.



Last week, the Centre allowed states to impose stock-holding limits on sugar to check hoarding for the first time since November 2011.

It is also planning to scrap an order mandating export of 40 lakh tonnes sugar during the 2015-16 season, with mills assigned individual quotas linked to their average production.

That notification, dated September 18, was ironically issued when mills were sitting on surplus stocks that were dragging down prices – and the worst of the drought in Maharashtra and Karnataka was still to come.

Today, the situation has reversed.

The Centre is concerned about sugar prices hardening further as the festival season approaches. But at the same time, it cannot afford to ignore the angry voices of UP's sugarcane growers in the run-up to next year's polls.



### **Veggie prices shoot up with drop in supply**

Vegetable prices in both the wholesale and retail markets have gone up in the past week because of inadequate supply within Maharashtra.

In what is bad news for consumers, the hike in the retail market is almost 100% in several cases.

Drought and extreme heat have hit production hard in the state. Usually, around 80% of the vegetables come from within the state and 20% from outside.

The wholesale market at APMC, which supplies vegetables to Mumbai, witnessed a sharp drop in arrivals from the state. Arrivals from outside the state are proving costlier.

Laxmisheth Pingle, former APMC director, said, "There is an almost 50% drop in the arrivals of vegetable crops from various areas of the state.

Earlier, around 600 to 700 vehicles would arrive daily to the market. Now we get only 450 to 500 vehicles daily.”



The wholesale market at APMC, which supplies vegetables to Mumbai, witnessed a sharp drop in arrivals from the state. (Bachchan Kumar)

He said, “There is now increased dependency on crops from Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Karnataka. Getting supplies from such far-off places increases the cost and also affects the quality of the supply.”

“Things are going to get worse in the coming days with prices rising further because of the shortage,” Pingle said.

While prices of the vegetables have certainly increased in the wholesale market, the hike in the retail market is steep.

Kamlesh Gupta, a vegetable vendor in Vashi, said, “We are having difficulty in getting the vegetables in the wholesale market and the ones we do get are expensive.”

“The crop that is arriving is not of good quality. A lot of what we purchase is rotten. We have to spend again to separate usable crop to sell to the customers, and in the end we are left with very little, which further pushes up the cost.”

“It is natural that the cost of vegetables will be higher in the retail market. The sales have gone down, but there is little we can do,” Gupta said.

Manisha Patil, a homemaker, said, “The prices have simply zoomed within a week, sending my budget into a tizzy. There is no option but to purchase in smaller quantities. It is becoming difficult to manage.”

Nishant Venkatram, 26, a Vashi resident said, “I always buy vegetables while returning from work. On Tuesday, I found the prices had increased by at least Rs40. It’s just becoming way too difficult for a middle class person to buy vegetables.”

## THE HINDU BusinessLine

### Centre gives 10,000 tonnes of pulses to four States as prices skyrocket



In a bid to control pulses prices that are inching close to ₹200/kg, the Centre on Wednesday said it has released 10,400 tonnes of tur and urad from its buffer stock for retail sale at a subsidised rate of ₹120/kg in Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu.

The Centre has built a buffer of 50,000 tonnes by way of domestic procurement. It is in the processing of procuring 1 lakh tonnes of chana and masoor in the ongoing Rabi season.

“From our buffer stock, we have released 400 tonnes of tur and urad to Kendriya Bhandar and Safal outlets in Delhi. We have given them unmilled

pulses. We have asked them sell at subsidised rate of not more than ₹120/kg after milling,” Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan told reporters.

Kendriya Bhandar, and Mother Dairy’s retail chain Safal, have informed they will sell tur and urad at subsidised rates via their retail outlets in the national capital from tomorrow, he added.

Paswan further said the Centre has released 2,000 tonnes of tur to Andhra Pradesh against the demand of 8,000 tonnes, while Telangana has also been given 2,000 tonnes of tur from the buffer stock against the demand of 15,000 tonnes.

In case of Tamil Nadu, the Centre has sanctioned 5,000 tonnes of urad against the demand of 10,000 tonnes, and 1,000 tonnes of tur has been released against the requirement of 2,000 tonnes.

Stating that pulses supplies are being augmented through buffer stock and imports, the Minister said the centre has contracted to import 26,000 tonnes of tur and urad so far this fiscal, of which 10,000 tonnes has already landed.

The Centre has also empowered States to impose stock limits on the pulses to ensure easy availability, he added.

Pulses’ prices have again started spiralling because of fall in domestic production due to back-to-back drought.

As per the Agriculture Ministry’s second estimate, pulses production is estimated at 17.33 million tonnes in 2015-16 crop year (July-June), marginally higher than the previous year’s production of 17.15 million tonnes.

### **Digital farming could shake up crop chemicals sector**

Global pesticides, seeds and fertiliser companies may be forced to re-engineer their business models as farmers adopt specialist technology that helps maximise harvests, while reducing the use of crop chemicals.

New businesses are springing up that promise to tell farmers how and when to till, sow, spray, fertilise or pick crops, based on algorithms using data from their own fields.

Their emphasis on reducing the use of chemicals and minerals – known as farming inputs – is a further challenge for an industry already struggling with weak agricultural markets worldwide.

“If our only goal is to sell as much inputs as possible by the litres of chemicals, I think we would have a real problem going forward,” said Liam Condon, Head of Crop Science at Bayer, the world’s second-largest pesticides supplier.

Bayer bought proPlant, a developer of software for plant health diagnostics, earlier this year. Rivals are also investing in digital farming with the aim of generating service revenues that could offset any future drop in chemicals volumes.

Monsanto’s failed swoop on Syngenta triggered a bout of M&A activity that has left the global seeds and pesticides industry in turmoil. The sector has annual sales of more than \$100 billion, while fertilisers are worth around \$175 billion.

### **Risks and challenges**

According to market research firm AgFunder, venture capital investments in food and agriculture technology nearly doubled to \$4.6 billion last year, with “precision agriculture” start-ups raising \$661 million in 2015, up 140 per cent from 2014.

For now, the main aim of these companies is to help farmers using their drones, field robots, decision support software and smart irrigation systems to boost yields, said Carsten Gerhardt, a chemicals industry specialist at advisors AT Kearney.

“But in the mid- to longer-term, I also expect a reduction in the use of input factors by about 30 to 40 per cent,” he added.

Eric Bartels, partner at McKinsey, who focuses on the agricultural industry, said developing new pesticides would help companies hedge against any drop in sales, however, because farmers will pay a premium to keep their fields pest-free.



Another question is whether today's chemicals and farm nutrients giants can capture the farm management software market for themselves.

Gerhardt said digital start-ups would struggle to catch up with established players' knowledge of plant biology and the farm business, and to build a global sales network.

Rabobank's farm sector analyst Harry Smit says crop chemicals and seed players diversifying into such services, will struggle to be seen as providers of impartial advice.

"Farmers want independence," said KWS Finance Chief Eva Kienle.

"They don't want to get the impression that they are being recommended a product just because the supplier is earning a profit on it."

### **Falling exports a concern, says Pranab**



President Pranab Mukherjee receives a coffee table book from Commerce Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in New Delhi on Wednesday

'Industry needs to be innovative to capture global markets'

Falling exports is an area of concern despite a healthy current account situation, as it impacts economic performance, industrial growth and



employment opportunities, President Pranab Mukherjee said in his keynote address at exporters' body Fieo's golden jubilee celebrations on Wednesday.

With global trade expected to remain sluggish in 2016-17 as well, the President said that all efforts need to be made to retain the country's share in the world market, and then make it grow.

“Indian policy makers and industry need to be innovative to capture global markets, with customised products and aggressive marketing backed by quality control and high standards,” Mukherjee said at the event.

He pointed out that India's exports of goods have been continuously declining since December 2014, although services exports fared slightly better.

While the export sector remained bleak, some comfort was brought about by falling global commodity prices, which led to a dwindling import bill and a healthy current account deficit of 1.4 per cent of the GDP in first three quarters of 2015-16, Mukherjee said.

Commerce and Industry Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who also spoke on the occasion, said the fall in export growth was tapering and better export performance was expected in the coming months.

The Minister said Indian exporters needed to work on improving the standards of their products, and integrate with the global value chain for better performance.

“There is a need for bringing in improved standards from within the industry. Today's world is hinging more on standards, and the industry should itself contemplate on it,” she said.

There has to be recognition of the fact that world trade is now not just in finished products but in bits and pieces, with everybody being linked to the value chain, she added.

India's exports have fallen for two consecutive years with a decline of 15.85 per cent in 2015-16 to \$261.13 billion. In 2014-15, exports were to the tune of \$310 billion, which were again lower than exports worth \$314 billion the year before.

## **In Telangana, paddy procurement goes online; farmers to get paid within 48 hrs**

The long wait for payments for nearly three crore farmers in Telangana State will be a thing of the past soon after selling their produce to government agencies, thanks to a new online paddy procurement process.

“For the first time, we are implementing the mandatory online payment process for the present Rabi season and there will be no manual process,” Rajat Kumar, Commissioner Civil Supplies and ex-officio Principal Secretary to Government of Telangana told Business Line here today.

The paddy procurement in the State, which follows a decentralised procurement programme, had commenced last month and will continue up to September under the Rabi season.

As part of the online process, an android device will be used to buy paddy from a farmer which captures his details such as name, Aadhar card and Jan Dhan accounts number, among others.

“When transaction completes, an alert will be sent through proper platforms to the State Bank of India which process the payment instantly and sends money to the beneficiary account in 48 hours,” the official said.

In the system being followed till now, every thing was manual and those papers were used to process the payment resulting in delays in payment to farmers besides allowing the middlemen to go for corrupt practices.

“Our idea is to take recourse to technology which helps farmers’ welfare and enhance administrative efficiency,” he said.

A pilot on online procurement was implemented in the Kharif procurement which ended in March.

Out of a total of 3.5 lakh transactions we had in Kharif season a little less than 10 per cent were online. But now, we have made it mandatory everywhere,” Rajat Kumar said.

There are about 2,000 paddy procurement centres in the 10 districts of Telangana. While half of them are managed by the women groups remaining were operated by primary agricultural societies and others

## RECORD

In the Kharif season, there was record procurement of 15.2 lakh tonnes of paddy despite prevailing drought conditions in the State covering 2.8 crore beneficiaries. The requirement for public distribution and others is about 22 lakh tonnes per year.

The procurement target for Rabi has been set at 9 lakh tonnes. ``We have already procured 3.2 lakh tonnes and are quite comfortable,`` Rajat Kumar added.

## **Cottonseed: Courts lift stay on value determination by Centre**

Close on the heels of Andhra Pradesh-Telangana High Court vacating a stay on a State Government Order (GO) that fixed the cottonseed value, the Karnataka High Court too vacated the interim stay it had imposed on the trait value determination by the Centre.

The court had given a stay in March on a writ petition filed by ABLE-AG (Association of Biotech-Led Enterprises – Agriculture) and Namdhari Seeds that challenged the Central order, particularly the trait value fixation.

``The Union government, a respondent, argued that the petitioners moved the Karnataka High Court even as the Delhi High Court is hearing a similar plea by Mahyco Monsanto Biotech Limited,`` the National Seed Association of India said in a statement on Wednesday.

``With this order, clarity has emerged for the seed industry to take up cottonseed production in the current production season to meet the demand.

The seed firms have already started implementing the Central price order that put the seed price at ₹800 a packet, with a trait value component of ₹49,`` Kalyan B Goswami, Executive Director of NSAI, said in the statement.

## **Amul to invest ₹2,500 crore to raise milk processing capacity by 2020: Rs. Sodhi**

Dairy major GCMMF, which sells products under the Amul brand, is planning to invest about ₹2,500 crore to raise its milk processing capacity to more than 38 million litres per day in the next four years.

“There has been rise in milk demand across the country and therefore, we are planning to raise our milk processing capacity by another 10 million litres per day from current capacity of 28.1 million litres per day (mltpd),” Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF) Managing Director Rs. Sodhi told PTI.

The cooperative is looking to raise the capacity by 2020, which will require an investment of about ₹2,500 crore, Sodhi added.

“As of now, we are looking to establish one plant each for milk processing in Kolkata and Mumbai and two more plants in Gujarat. Besides this, we have plans to raise the capacity in few existing plants,” he said.

The cooperative has about 60 various processing plants, of which 40 are in Gujarat only.

About 50 per cent of Amul’s turnover comes from milk sale only, commodity business contributes 5-7 per cent and the rest comes from value-added products segment.

Besides milk, the cooperative is focusing on value-added products like cheese and has raised cheese producing capacity three times to 120 tonnes per day, from 40 tonnes per day in the last six months, as it was unable to meet the rising demand, he added.

In the last six years, the dairy cooperative’s turnover has jumped nearly three—fold to ₹23,000 crore and is aiming to more than double it to ₹50,000 crore by 2020, Sodhi said.

There are 17 member unions of GCMMF associated with more than 36 lakh farmers across 18,600 villages of Gujarat.

The member unions of GCMMF have also established their own milk processing plants in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Rajasthan and is procuring milk from other states.

## Business Standard

### Centre to buy 15,000 tonnes onion to control prices

Took a few days ago decision empowering states to impose stock limits on sugar to check hoarding



The Centre on Wednesday decided to purchase around 15,000 tonnes of onion from farmers to push up the commodity's prices, which have been reeling at record lows.

The government also started selling 400 tonnes of tur and urad in Delhi through SAFAL stores and Kendriya Bhandars at a fixed rate to cool the market.

It also proposed a stock limit of 5,000 quintals for sugar traders in most parts of the country also to bring down prices.

A decision empowering the states to impose stock limits on sugar to check hoarding had already been taken few days ago.

In Kolkata and its adjoining areas, this limit has been proposed at 10,000 tonnes.

“Onion will be purchased at a price of Rs 8.5-9.50 per kg, which is far more than the prevailing market rate of Rs 1-2 per kg with an intention to help the farmers,” Food Minister Ramvilas Paswan told reporters.

The commodity will be bought by state-run National Agriculture Cooperative Marketing Federation (Nafed) and Small Farmers’ Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC), both of whom function under the ministry of agriculture.

The difference between the market rate of onion and the price at which the Centre plans to purchase it from farmers will be adjusted from the newly-created Rs 900-crore price stabilisation fund.

Already, Nafed has purchased around 1,500 tonnes of onion from farmers in Maharashtra’s Nashik, while SFAC has bought 800 tonnes.

In Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, where prices have dropped to record lows due to bumper harvest, a high-level team of officials will visit to explore storage facilities in those states.

“It must be understood that FCI (Food Corporation of India) or state and Central Warehousing Corporations are not equipped to handle onion storage and we don’t have adequate facilities across the country, which is why there is some delay,” said Paswan.

He added that instructions have been issued to state officials to hire private storage centres to store the onion purchased from farmers so that it can be liquidated as soon as prices rise.

This year's onion production is expected to be 20.3 million tonnes (mt) against 19 mt last year.

On pulses, the minister said the Centre has already created a buffer stock of



50,000 tonnes of pulses and has written to states to approach it for allotment of pulses, which can then be sold through retail outlets.

“We're giving un-milled tur at the rate of Rs 66 a kg and urad at Rs 82 a kg, which the states are free to sell at a price, which should not exceed Rs 120 a kg after taking into account milling, storing and transporting charges,” Paswan added.

In Delhi, 400 tonnes of tur and urad will be sold through the SAFAL stores and Kendriya Bhandars at a rate of Rs 120 a kg from Wednesday onwards.

So far, Paswan said Rajasthan has placed a demand for 1,000 tonnes of tur and urad from the buffer stock.

Andhra Pradesh has placed an order for 8,000 tonnes of tur and an allocation of 2,000 tonnes has already been made towards it.

Tamil Nadu has demanded 10,000 tonnes of tur and 5,000 tonnes of urad and it has been allocated 2,000 tonnes of tur and 1,000 tonnes of urad, while Telangana has placed an order for 15,000 tonnes of tur and it has been allocated 2,000 tonnes.

Maharashtra, one of the country's main pulses growing-states, has placed an order for 30,000 tonnes of pulses.

“We have till now purchased 50,000 tonnes of pulses for the buffer and are in process of buying another 100,000 tonnes during the current rabi season.

Plus, 26,000 tonnes are being imported.

Therefore, we are fully prepared to meet any demand from the states,” Paswan said.

On sugar, the minister said the Centre's recent decision to empower states to impose stock-holding limits won't have any impact on mills' ability to clear cane dues, because much of the arrears have already been paid.

“The stock-holding limit is just a start and we'll take all steps to ensure that there is no unusual rise in prices,” the minister said.

He said that already, the May, July and September futures were showing a rise in prices, which was one of the reasons behind the government's recent clampdown on sugar traders.

The minister said India might end up exporting 1.5 mt of sugar and the total closing stock as on September 30, 2016 was 6.97 mt - 20 per cent less than the previous close.

### **Govt to purchase 15,000 tonnes of onions due to bumper crop**

Onion production this year is to the tune of 20.3 million tonnes as against 19.0 million tonnes last year, Ram Vilas Paswan said



*A greengrocer sells onions at Aazadpur Mandi in New Delhi, on Monday, 24 August 2015 **Picture by PTI***

Government will purchase 15,000 tonnes of onions in a move to help the growers in the wake of a bumper crop that has sharply brought down prices, the Lok Sabha was informed on Wednesday.

Food and Civil Supplies Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said this in a brief intervention during the Zero Hour when concern was expressed over the fall in prices affecting the onion growers.

Noting that onion production this year is to the tune of 20.3 million tonnes as against 19.0 million tonnes last year, the minister said that a decision to purchase 15,000 tonnes of the produce has been taken.

Purchases have already started as there is infrastructure, he said in Nashik. The Centre has sent teams to all onion producing states, including Rajasthan, he added.

The minister said that the states could also purchase the produce under the price stabilisation fund mechanism.

The Food Corporation of India, he said, does not have the proper godowns to store onions and was ready to take them on rent from private sector.

Raising the issue during zero hour, Bharatiya Janata Party member Manoj Rajouria expressed concern over the plight of the onion growers due to sharp fall in prices. Supported by his party colleagues, he wanted the Centre to intervene to help the farmer.

### **Bt cotton: Karnataka HC removes stay on Centre's seed price control order**



The high court of Karnataka has removed its earlier interim stay on implementing a part of the order issued last December.

the central government to cap the price of genetically modified (termed 'Bt') cotton seed.

Mahyco Monsanto Biotech (MMBL), a joint venture of multinational seeds company Monsanto, has also challenged the order at the high court in this city. After the order, Monsanto had said it would have to 're-evaluate' its businesses in this country.

MMBL has sub-licensed Bt cotton seed technology since 2002 to various domestic seed companies.

Removing the Karnataka HC stay had been urged by the Union government, supported by the National Seed Association of India and some others.

The interim stay was in March, on the portion empowering the central government to regulate the 'trait value' (licence fee) entered into between two parties, on the ground that it was based on a mutual agreement.

It had not interfered with that part of the order which fixed a uniform maximum retail price (MRP) of all Bt cotton seeds.

The stay was granted on a petition filed by the Association of Biotech-Led Enterprises-Agriculture (ABLE-AG), Namdhari Seeds and some others.

"We are reviewing the order and considering our options," sated Shivendra Bajaj, executive director, ABLE-AG, on Wednesday.

After the Union ministry of agriculture had notified the Cotton Seeds Price (Control) Order, a committee was formed to determine various cost components and fix the MRP, along with seed value and trait value.

The order lowered the trait value or licence fee that companies like MMBL could charge from seed companies by 70 per cent. And, the MRP for seed companies by 25 per cent.

The government order came against the backdrop of disputes wherein some licensees refused to honour their commitments to pay MMBL, after collecting these amounts from cotton farmers in last year's kharif season.



# THE TIMES OF INDIA

## **Use water judiciously: PAU expert to farmers**

In view of water crisis in present agriculture scenario, GS Buttar, Additional Director of Extension Education, Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) urged the agriculture officers and the scientists to promote water conservation technologies among the farming community.

He was speaking at the one-day workshop on "Irrigation Systems in Different Spring Crops of Punjab," organized by the Directorate of Extension Education, PAU.

As many as 19 participants from the State Departments of Agriculture and Soil Conservation, and scientists from Krishi Vigyan Kendras and Farm Advisory Service Centres participated in the workshop.

Chairing the concluding session, Buttar emphasized on the judicious use of water and advised the participants to transfer water saving technologies to other farmers as well.

"Dissemination of technologies like keeping the water standing continuously for first 15 days after transplanting paddy and thereafter, applying irrigation two days after infiltration of the ponded water, amongst the farmers in their respective areas is the need of the hour," he added.

During the workshop, experts discussed design of drip irrigation system, water requirement and irrigation scheduling for spring crops, different water saving technologies and use of poor quality water in irrigation.

## **Ghaywan to donate National Award cash prize for farmers**

National Award prize money for the relief work for distressed farmers in Maharashtra.

While Ghaywan received the best debut directing honour at the 63rd National Awards for "Masaan", Grover picked the best lyricist award for "Moh Moh Ke Dhaage" ('Dum Laga Ke Haisha').

Ghaywan got Rs 1.25 lakh as the cash prize and Grover was rewarded with Rs 50,000.

"Me and @varungrover have decided to donate our National Award prize money towards relief work for distressed farmers in Maharashtra," the director said.

"Out of the 1.25 lakh prize money, I will donate 50,000. Together, me and @varungrover will donate 1 lakh rupees.

Of course, it's a small amount, but my intent to make it public is to draw attention to agrarian crisis & encourage possible contributions," he added.

Varun, who is donating all the winning money, said they will make sure the money is sent through a reliable channel.

"Am donating all of it (INR 50k) & combined with @ghaywan's it'll be INR 1L. We'll find a credible channel so that it reaches the most needy.

I know it's just a drop in the ocean & the situation needs much more involvement (and not just cash), but at the moment this HAD to be done.

"Also chose to make it public mainly to inspire others. If nothing else, just read about the string of crises our farmers face every year..." PSH BK

### **Farmers duped of over Rs 1 cr through forged kisan cards**

Several farmers of three villages of Sitapur block of Surguja district have been duped of over Rs 1 crore through fake KCCs (kisan credit cards).

Farmers, who were duped so, came to know about the forgery when they recently received bank notices for recovery.

Affected farmers have lodged a complaint with the district collector at Jan Darshan. They belong to village Sarga, Gersa and Shivnathpur.

One of the victims, Sudri Ram, resident of village Sarga, has lodged a complaint against Navin Kumar Agrawal and his brother Brijmohan Agrawal, also residents of the same village, that the two had got a fake KCC made in his name and had withdrawn Rs 9 lakh on the basis of the same



from Pathalgaon branch of Bank of Baroda. Sudri Ram came to know about it when he got a recovery notice from the bank.

Sudri Ram further alleged in his report that several farmers of Gersa and Shivnathour villages of Sitapur block have also been similarly duped.

Sudri Ram has also alleged in his report that some bank officials too are involved in the racket.

He said when he confronted Navin and Brijmohan and told them that he is going to lodge a report in this connection, the two deposited Rs 8.50 lakh back into his account.

However, there are other farmers who have suffered thus and are facing bank recovery notices. Police have taken cognizance of the matter and are investigating further.

## THE ECONOMIC TIMES

### **Centre buys 2,300 tons of onion so far to build buffer**



The buffer stock of onion is being created using the Rs 900-crore Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF). The objective of this fund is to control price volatility.

NEW DELHI: The Centre has procured 2,300 tons of onions directly from farmers this year so far to build buffer stock to be utilised for market intervention in the event of price rise during a lean season.

The buffer stock of onion is being created using the Rs 900-crore Price Stabilisation Fund ( PSF).

The objective of this fund is to control price volatility, thereby protecting interest of farmers and consumers.

The fund is being used for creating buffer stock of pulses and potato also.

"We are aiming to buy 15,000 tons of onion this year. So far, nodal agencies Nafed and SFAC have procured 1,500 tonnes and 800 tonnes, respectively," Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan told reporters.

The storage quality onion has been purchased directly from farmers in the price range of Rs 8.50-9 per kg.

The stock would be kept at Lasalgoan, he said.

With onion prices ruling lower at Rs 2-3 per kg in Maharashtra, these two agencies are buying onion in the state to ensure support price to onion growers, he said adding that onion will also be procured from other growing states like Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

The arrival of rabi (winter) crop of onion has began and and cooperative firm NAFED will buy in total 10,000 tonnes, while the Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) will procure 5,000 tonnes.

On storage of onion, Paswan said that onion procured from Maharashtra is being stored at Nasik and the nodal agencies have been asked to explore hiring of godowns in other states and even state governments have been told in this regard.

A team has been sent to Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh to explore godowns for storage of onions, he added.

Last year, the government procured 8,000 tonnes of onion but only after retail prices went through the roof.

This time, the Consumer Affairs Ministry has been asked to prepare timely import plans for pulses and onions. It has also been asked to intervene in the market on time so that consumers are not affected by price rise.

Onion production is estimated to be increase to 20.33 million tonnes in 2015-16 from 18.92 million tonnes in the previous year, as per the Agriculture Ministry data.

At present, retail price of onion is ruling at Rs 20 per kg in the national capital. Normally, prices flare up during August-September period.

### **Centre gives 10,000 ton pulses to 4 states to sell at lower rate**



The Centre has built a buffer of 50,000 tonnes by way of domestic procurement. It is in the processing of procuring one lakh tonnes of chana and masoor in the ongoing rabi season.

NEW DELHI: In a bid to control pulses prices which are inching close to Rs 200/kg, the Centre today said it has released 10,400 tonnes of tur and urad from its buffer stock for retail sale at subsidised rate of Rs 120/kg in Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu.

The Centre has built a buffer of 50,000 tonnes by way of domestic procurement. It is in the processing of procuring one lakh tonnes of chana and masoor in the ongoing rabi season.

"From our buffer stock, we have released 400 tonnes of tur and urad to Kendriya Bhandar and Safal outlets in Delhi.

We have given them unmilled pulses. We have asked them sell at subsidised rate of not more than Rs 120/kg after milling," Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan told reporters.

Kendriya Bhandar and Mother Dairy's retail chain Safal have informed that they will sell tur and urad at subsidised rates via their retail outlets in the national capital from tomorrow, he added.

Paswan further said that the Centre has released 2,000 tonnes of tur to the Andhra Pradesh government against the demand of 8,000 tonnes, while Telangana has also been given 2,000 tonnes of tur from the buffer stock against the demand of 15,000 tonnes.

In case of Tamil Nadu, the government has sanctioned 5,000 tonnes of urad against the demand of 10,000 tonnes and 1,000 tonnes of tur has been released against the requirement of 2,000 tonnes.

The Maharashtra government has placed an order for 30,000 tonnes of tur and urad, Paswan said, adding that the decision on this will be taken soon.

He also mentioned that the Rajasthan government has placed an order of 1,000 tonnes each of tur and urad over the phone and will send a formal proposal soon.

Even Haryana and Karnataka governments have communicated that they will send their demand of pulses soon, he added.

Stating that pulses supplies are being augmented through buffer stock and imports, the Minister said the centre has contracted to import 26,000 tonnes of tur and urad so far this fiscal, of which 10,000 tonnes has already landed.

Unlike last year, the government has started imports through state-run MMTC on time to augment domestic supplies and check prices, he said.

The Centre has also empowered the states to impose stock limits on the pulses to ensure easy availability, he added.

Pulses prices have again started spiralling because of fall in domestic production due to back-to-back drought.

Urad is available at Rs 195/kg, tur at Rs 170/kg, moong dal at Rs 121/kg , masoor dal at Rs 105/kg and gram at Rs 85/kg today in retail markets, as per the government data.

As per the Agriculture Ministry's second estimate, pulses production is estimated at 17.33 million tonnes in 2015-16 crop year (July-June), marginally higher than the previous years production of 17.15 million tonnes.

India is the world's largest producer of pulses, but its domestic demand outstrips production. The shortfall is met through imports.

### **India to start 2016-17 sugar year with 21.3% lower stocks: Ram Vilas Paswan**

India is likely to start the 2016-17 marketing year on October 1 with 7 million tonnes in carry-forward stocks, down 21.3 per cent from a year ago, Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said.



NEW DELHI: India, the world's biggest sugar consumer, is likely to start the 2016-17 marketing year on October 1 with 7 million tonnes in carry-forward stocks, down 21.3 per cent from a year ago, Food Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said on Wednesday.

The production in the current year ending September 30 is likely to drop following two drought years in a row.

The centre has asked state governments to impose stock limits on sugar to avoid hoarding by traders.

India is likely to become a net importer of sugar in 2016-17 as back-to-back drought years and dry irrigation channels ravage cane fields, with output in Uttar Pradesh, biggest sugarcane producing state seen dropping by more than 40 per cent.

### **Government to purchase 15,000 tonnes of onions due to bumper crop**



Ram Vilas Paswan said this in a brief intervention during the Zero Hour when concern was expressed over the fall in prices affecting the onion growers.



NEW DELHI: Government will purchase 15,000 tonnes of onions in a move to help the growers in the wake of a bumper crop that has sharply brought down prices, the Lok Sabha was informed today.

Food and Civil Supplies Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said this in a brief intervention during the Zero Hour when concern was expressed over the fall in prices affecting the onion growers.

Noting that onion production this year is to the tune of 203 lakh tonnes as against 190 lakh tonnes last year, the Minister said a decision to purchase 15,000 tonnes of the produce has been taken.

He said in Nashik, purchases have already started as there is infrastructure. The Centre has sent teams to all onion producing states including Rajasthan, he added.

The Minister said the states could also purchase the produce under the price stabilisation fund mechanism.

The Food Corporation of India, he said, does not have the proper godowns to store onions and was ready to take them on rent from private sector.

Raising the issue during zero hour, BJP member Manoj Rajouria expressed concern over the plight of the onion growers due to sharp fall in prices. Supported by his party colleagues, he wanted the Centre to intervene to help the farmer.